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ABSTRACT

These four quarterly newsletter issues address various topics of interest to child caregivers. Each issue includes articles on a specific theme, along with regular news or a column by an AECI Executive Board vice president. The Fall 2000 issue focuses on the special features and unique concerns of employer-sponsored child care, with one article discussing the development of the child care center at Brookhaven National Laboratories and another article exploring the administrator's role in building relationships with families in employer-supported programs. The Winter 2000 issue concerns cultural differences in child rearing practices. One article provides a mother's account of her experiences as a first-time mother from New Hampshire living in the Dominican Republic. The second article compares one mother's experiences with toilet training her children in China and the United States. Both articles express appreciation of the challenges and rewards of cultural differences and offer insights into how they negotiated those differences. The Spring 2001 issue offers some perspectives on helping young children learn to regulate their own behavior and get along with others, highlighting the primary importance of respecting young children. Articles focus on promoting prosocial behavior in the classroom and using timeout effectively. The Summer 2001 issue focuses on the use of computers with toddlers and includes articles on parents' beliefs and practices, when to introduce children to computers, and educators' recommendations regarding using computers with very young children. (KB)

**Focus on Infants & Toddlers (Ages 0-3):
A Quarterly Newsletter for the Education Community,
2000-2001.**

Virginia M. Barry, Editor
Patricia Cantor, Editor

Volume 13, Numbers 1-4

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Focus On **Infants & Toddlers**

ages 0-3

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY

Theme

More and more employers are recognizing the benefits of offering on-site, employer-sponsored child care to their employees. This issue looks at some of the special features and unique concerns of employer-sponsored child care. One article focuses on the development of a child care center at Brookhaven National Laboratories in New York; another explores the role of the administrator in building relationships with families in employer-sponsored programs. We are interested to know more about readers' experiences in or with employer-sponsored child care. Please send your contributions to:

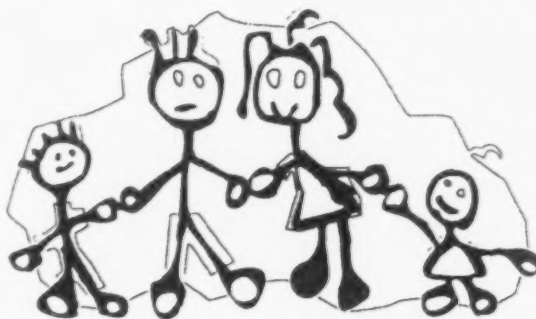
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On-Site Child Care: "Home Being Where the Job Is . . ."

*Deborah O'Neil, Director, Child Development Center,
Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York
Susan Foster, Employee Relations Counselor,
Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York*

In response to the increasing awareness of on-site child care's benefits, Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) in Upton, New York, has developed the BNL Child Development Center, an NAEYC accredited program. Recognizing that family is as important as work, BNL management created this on-site facility to help employees meet the increasing demands of career and family.

BNL began by forming a child care initiative committee that surveyed its employees to identify their issues and objectives regarding child care. The committee utilized the information obtained from parents to establish the basic criteria for an on-site program. The Child Development Center opened in 1991, a pioneer of the federal government's commitment to supporting



on-site child care.

For BNL, one primary concern was the difficulty of recruiting and retaining research professionals. The provision for on-site child care meant that many prospective employees with families now would consider extended appointments. In addition, on-site care positively affected job

performance, reducing absenteeism and tardiness. If parents are in close proximity to their children, they can respond to specific needs and health concerns without extended periods away from the workplace.

A study conducted in 1988 by the Families and Work Institute revealed that when on-site care is not available or used, employees with young children missed an average of 13 days per year. Employees who had on-site care missed an average of eight days. A professional child care staff can further minimize unnecessary departures from work-related activities. According to another study by the Families and Work Institute, an employee's ability to concentrate is hindered by multiple child care arrangements, which are always at risk of breaking down.

The provision for on-site child care meant that many prospective employees with families now would consider extended appointments. In addition, on-site care positively affected job performance, reducing absenteeism and tardiness.

Job performance is also significantly affected by employee morale, which can be heightened by availability of on-site child care. Several studies indicate that family-friendly companies that offer on-site care attract more dedicated employees.

The Child Development Center at BNL has an open-door policy, allowing for constant parent involvement throughout the day. It is not unusual to see mothers breast-feeding, and parents on their breaks visiting with their children. Parents are also encouraged to get involved in special activities, such as Farm Animal Outreach visits and Science and Activity Fairs. Parent conferences are scheduled during the day for parents. It is also of great value for the Child Development Center staff to be able to contact a parent quickly with more immediate concerns. The parents are

recruited to participate in the Child Development Center Parent Council, a contractual arrangement to facilitate parent involvement.

The success of the Child Development Center is attributable, in part, to the formal liaison between the child care center and the BNL administration. The Employee Relations Administrator serves in this capacity as a conduit for information, an advocate for concerned parents, and, primarily, an adviser for issues and reforms to enhance the effectiveness of the program. The role of this individual is essential to the success of any on-site program in which an outside contractor is employed. Careful consideration should be given to the selection of the person or group who will be assigned this responsibility, as the success of any such program is dependent upon the effective execution of this role.

Building Relationships With Families in an Employee-Sponsored Child Care Program

Patricia Cantor, Associate Professor,
Plymouth State College, Plymouth, NH

As any child care center director can tell you, working with families can be one of the most enjoyable and, at the same time, most frustrating aspects of the job. That was certainly the case for me during my six years as director of a college-sponsored, on-site early childhood program. While tact and sensitivity are always essential in establishing relationships with the families of the children in your care, I soon learned that these qualities are particularly important in an employer-sponsored program. In these situations, parents often have higher expectations of the staff and program. They may feel freer to voice their criticisms and expect an immediate response. Because many of the parents already know each other from working together, the rumor mill may seem to work even more efficiently than in other child care programs. Despite these potential problems, however, employer-sponsored child care programs can offer more opportunities to form mutually satisfying, rewarding relationships with families.

As director, one of my priorities each year was to create a sense of community among the families involved in our program. This involved making families feel welcome in the first place, maintaining frequent and open communication, and providing opportunities for families to share in center life. The suggestions that follow are intended to be helpful to any child care program, with some being especially useful in employer-sponsored programs. Since

most of our relationships with families begin when children enter the toddler program, I have focused on relationships with parents of very young children.

Enrollment Policies

While our child care center usually has long waiting lists for all of our programs, toddler through kindergarten, the toddler wait list is always the longest. Because the surrounding community has limited options for toddler care, parents feel a little desperate about gaining their toddler a place in our program. Although we do not allow parents to file applications until after their children are born, we often receive applications from parents of newborns, seeking a place for their child one or two years later.

In our college community, many parents know each other or know of each other. I was surprised by the extent to which some parents compared rank on the wait list, jockeyed for position, and sniped at those whose children were accepted. We have a clear policy that children of faculty, staff,

While tact and sensitivity are always essential in establishing relationships with the families of the children in your care, I soon learned that these qualities are particularly important in an employer-sponsored program.

and students take precedence on the wait list over children of non-employees. Many parents felt that the policy should be further defined, with certain groups of employees taking precedence over others! We soon learned through bitter experience not to discuss status on the waiting list with parents, no matter how hard they pressed. Fortunately, most years, we have been able to accommodate all parents who desired care for their toddlers.

Before children are accepted into our toddler program, we require that the child's parents or guardians meet with the director and make an extended visit to the classroom. This initial meeting gives us the opportunity to learn something of the child's life at home, the family's expectations, and their concerns. At the meeting, we go over the information about the child that the family has shared, and review our policy handbook. Arrangements are made so that the toddler teacher can step out of the classroom for a few moments to talk with the parents.

Welcoming Families to the Center

Our center is closed for two months during the summer. In the fall, usually the day before we open, the center holds an open house for all families. The open house gives parents the chance to meet other families who will be involved in the toddler program. We reiterate our open-door policy, and begin to discuss ways of easing the transition for the toddlers (and their parents).

Parents are encouraged to bring in some of the items their child will need, such as diapers and extra clothes, as well as family photos to post in the child's cubby. This way, when the child begins her first day at the center, she will find some familiar belongings to make her feel more comfortable.

The family photos are a very important part of the transition process. We have found that toddlers spend a lot of time looking at their own photos and then later at the other children's. They like pointing out their parents and siblings and grandparents and pets, and learning the names of the other children's family members. We often notice the toddlers pointing to the appropriate photograph every time someone arrives to drop off or pick up a child. Within a few weeks, no matter



how well-laminated, the photos are dog-eared and crinkled, evidence of how much they are loved.

During the first days of a child's entrance into the toddler program, the teachers work with the parents to develop a transition plan for each family. The process of acclimating to the center varies from child to child and family to family, and the teachers try to individualize the transition as much as possible. Some parents worry that they are overstaying their welcome in the morning, and need reassurance that it is all right to spend extra time. Parents who are having difficulty parting with their children need a little gentle coaxing on how to say good-bye in a way that is not upsetting to the child. Sometimes, toddlers find it comforting to visit their big brothers or sisters in other classrooms during the day. Surprisingly, however, we often find that it is the older children who need to visit their toddler siblings for comfort.

Because so many of our parents work at the college, we encourage them to drop in to visit any time, once the child feels comfortable saying good-bye. Parents of toddlers often stop in to have lunch with their children or to read them to sleep at naptime. A quiet space is made available for breast-feeding mothers to nurse their children. At pick-up time, parents are often accompanied by older siblings, a big event for all the toddlers. The staff try to make drop-off and pick-up times as relaxed as possible for families and children.

Because we have low staff turnover and because many families stay with us for several years, there is a strong sense of continuity at the center. All of

the teachers make a point of interacting with all of the children on a regular basis. This means that children and families know and feel comfortable with all of the staff, making for smoother transitions from program to program. Many teachers from other classrooms drop by during their break times to visit in the toddler room, offering an extra lap or pair of arms and a chance for the children to get to know them. This extra help is especially important during the first few weeks, when the children are getting used to group care. As director, I made it a priority to spend a couple of hours each day in the toddler room at the beginning of each new program year, especially during transition times. This also gave me the chance to get to know the parents better.

Communicating With Families

The toddler teachers talk with the children's families each day at arrival and departure times. They also communicate to parents in writing each day about each child. These written communications range from journals, in which parents and teachers write back and forth, to brief summaries of key moments in the child's day, depending on what format the family prefers. Usually, families feel that their oral communication with teachers is so strong that written communication is not as necessary.

Because the director seldom has the opportunity to see someone from each family each day, I felt it was important for me to communicate regularly in writing. These communications took the form of letters about center happenings, copies of interesting articles, and notices of upcoming events. But communication is a two-way exchange. Because some parents may feel uncomfortable raising concerns in person, we try to give them opportunities to express their concerns in writing. After the first six weeks, parents are sent an evaluation form to use if they choose. In addition to asking for suggestions, commendations, and comments, the form includes a space for parents to check if they wish to be contacted by their child's teacher or the director in response to a particular concern. Suggestion forms are available to families throughout

the year, and another formal evaluation occurs at year-end.

Early in the fall of each year, we offer an evening presentation for parents called "A Day in the Life of the Toddler Program." This features a videotape that we have made of typical routines and activities in the toddler program—including, of course, every child in the program. We share the videotape with the parents, using it to illustrate our program's philosophy and approach. This presentation is well-attended by parents, grandparents, and other family members. It does a lot to clear up questions that parents have. It is especially reassuring for parents to see that the same toddler who cries when they leave each morning actually participates with zest and enjoyment in

*Because so many of our
parents work at the college, we
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comfortable saying good-bye.*

the daily activities. Parents also have the chance to see and hear about how staff handle typical behaviors that occur in group toddler care, like pushing and hitting and refusing to share. During the presentation, I often sensed the parents giving a huge, collective sigh of relief. After the presentation, parents appeared much more relaxed in bringing their child each morning and more comfortable in talking with me and the staff. This evening get-together sets the tone for relaxed and open exchanges throughout the year.

For many people today, workplaces provide a sense of community, where joint endeavors are pursued and colleagues work together to achieve shared goals. The employer-sponsored child care center can be an extension of that sense of community, by providing a place where children and families feel comfortable, secure, and at home.

Something To Think About . . .

Employer-sponsored child care has a long history in our society. We all know how important a child care option is to parents in the work force. Parents seem to truly appreciate the security and convenience of on-site care, and are often quite involved in the day-to-day operation of the program. Directors of employer-sponsored programs are sometimes in difficult situations, since many employees might feel that the on-site child care program is subject to employer control with regard to curriculum.

It is not uncommon for parents to read or hear about a type of program or philosophy and learn of its purported successes. Parents may not understand the specific approach of the program, but know it is supposed to support such things as early reading, writing, language development, or even technology skills. Naturally, parents want their children to flourish and maybe even be competitive; therefore, they look for programs that pursue what they view to be important in early development. The problem occurs if too many parents suggest programs that are conflicting in ideas and approaches and are not based on the needs of very young children. As a result, a director may spend a great deal of time

convincing parents about what is best for their children.

The following may be some simple ways to avoid confusion and help parents understand the complexities of child care for young children:

- As a director, be sure that the company that employs you has a good understanding of the importance of developmentally appropriate practices. Before accepting a position, discuss the employer goals for the program. J. McVicker Hunt (1963) established the notion of the "theory of the match." You must be careful that your viewpoint complements the employer's vision for the program. If the company has no specific goals in mind, this is a good opportunity to develop a program focused on the needs of the children. For example, if the company assumes that the program will offer 12-hour days or two work shifts, you will have to help the company recognize how difficult long days are for children.
- It is important to be able to clearly articulate your philosophy in such a way that parents know that you consider their child's healthy development to be your most important goal.
- Familiarity with other programs in your community is important so that you can discuss any differences in approaches and explain the specific elements of your curriculum.

• Parents need to understand the concept of "optimal development" and learn how as early childhood educators, we consider all aspects of child development in our planning (physical, social-emotional, linguistic, cognitive, and familial).

• Providing parents with reading materials that help them to understand the program is key to any program's success. Parents today want to stay informed and understand different practices related to development and learning.

• A program handbook is helpful on all levels. A written document explaining the mission, philosophy, and goals of the program is useful to all persons involved in the program. It is particularly helpful for informing parents about policies and procedures that support young children.

• A parent advisory board can be a useful group to assist with communication and policy development and will often help with issues of continuity in planning.

While employer-sponsored child care can present some frustrations, the benefits to the child and family cannot be disputed. Our goal should be to help companies interested in this employee benefit to consider the child's needs first when planning an on-site program.

—V.B.

greetings from Finland

This year we had a wonderful summer—lots of sun, not many mosquitoes, and warm long days. Summertime is holiday time in Finland. After the long school year, teachers do need a holiday to get energy for the next school year. Finnish teachers who are working in compulsory schools have 10 weeks of summer holiday, but preschool teachers and teachers in child care have only 6 weeks of paid holiday.

Our teachers have done a very good job. Finnish children are among the best readers in the world. For Finnish preschool teachers, this year will be extremely challenging. We are going to implement a kindergarten renewal, in which kindergarten will become part of the school system. Our parents expect that all of the children's environments, including preschool, child care, and school, will be of high quality, and emphasize play and social interaction with peers and teachers. Parents do not emphasize academic skills for children too early.

The strategy for implementing a kindergarten renewal involves listening to the parents and children themselves very carefully. This is also the strategy for Finnish quality management in early childhood education. I suppose that our teachers will have plenty of questions during this coming kindergarten renewal process. ACEI's conferences in Toronto and Manila next year could be very beneficial in offering contacts with other teachers who have been involved with developing kindergarten programs.

I hope that you have had a relaxing summer holiday and that you enjoy being back at work.

—Eeva Hujala, Vice President
Representing Infancy/
Early Childhood



Call for Manuscripts

The readership of *Focus on Infants & Toddlers* is encouraged to submit ideas and manuscripts related to the care, education, development, and learning of infants and toddlers and their families. Editorial assistance is available if needed.

If you have any materials or suggestions to be considered, please contact the Editors:



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Focus
On

Infants & Toddlers

ages 0-3

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY

Theme

We are very pleased to share with you in this issue the reflections of two mothers who have had first-hand experience with cultural differences in child rearing practices. Meg Petersen, a New Hampshire native, writes about what it was like to be a first-time mother while living in the Dominican Republic. Mary Exton, who moved to the United States from China, compares her experiences with toilet training her children in the two different countries. Both mothers express genuine appreciation of the challenges and rewards of cultural differences and offer insights into how they negotiated those differences.

Readers who are interested in cultural aspects of child rearing may enjoy a new book, *A World of Babies: Imagined Childcare Guides for Seven Societies*, edited by Judy DeLoache and Alma Gottlieb (Cambridge University Press, available in paperback). Although fictional, the child care manuals in the book draw on a rich background of ethnographic knowledge to advise new parents in seven different cultures. *A World of Babies*, like the articles in this issue, reminds us that there are many different ways to raise happy, healthy children, and that we have much to learn from each other.

—P.C.

The Lives of the
People Who Put
It Together

Meg Petersen,
Plymouth, New Hampshire

I did not set out to become an authority on cross-cultural parenting. When I went to live and work in the Dominican Republic (for what I thought would be two years, but which eventually stretched into four), I was newly married and without any immediate plans to start a family. As soon as I realized that I was pregnant, I kept encountering situations that violated my expectations of what parenting would be about. Clearly, this was a very different experience from what I had imagined.

It began with the older Dominican women, who thought they could determine the gender of the unborn child by the shape of the *barrigua* (Spanish for belly). They were all wrong, each insisting that I was carrying a girl. Dominicans were adamant about knowing whether we wanted a boy or a girl, and would not be put off by answers about just wanting a healthy baby. At the time, I found their questions to be rude and intrusive, but later came to appreciate that being open about such things may help one come to terms with them. Pretending not to feel something, simply because you are not supposed to feel it, is not the best way of dealing with the world.

After my son, Sam, was born in June of 1990, I was further surprised by prevalent attitudes. Dominicans do not celebrate the birth of a child. In fact, they are careful to mention the infant as little as possible, so as not to tempt fate and risk tragedy. Also, many people were scandalized to see me walking about with Sam in a baby carrier (although they were intrigued by the device itself—unnecessary in a place where so

many arms are available and willing to hold a baby). I learned I should not be out of the house with the baby until he had "made his 42 days." After the baby has reached six weeks, people are more comfortable assuming he will live, and so begin to feel free to acknowledge him.

Often, I would come to check on Sam while he was sleeping and find that Nancy (whose real name was Dionisia), the woman who cared for him while I was at work, had tied a small piece of yarn around his wrist. She would become very upset if I took it off, believing that the yarn would protect him from evil spirits.

At first, I would remove the bracelet, as I was reluctant to "give in to some kind of voodoo" by keeping it there. Eventually, I decided to let it be. I realized that perhaps these things make sense in a country where so many infants do not survive their first year. When a child does survive, any little thing about those first weeks enters the mythology as having accounted for the success—maybe it was the yarn bracelet. Perhaps the Dominicans are living closer to the world of the spirits that Westerners choose not to recognize.

When Sam was an infant, I was deluged with unsolicited advice, often from people who did not even know me. Once, I was walking down a back street in a country town when a woman approached me to tell me not to carry the baby on my hip and that, furthermore, if I did not put something on his

feet, he would develop severe stomach troubles.

Some of the reactions I got were more clearly indicative of cultural divides. Nancy was very upset when Sam began to take his first steps before he was 9 months of age. She told him to stop walking, that he was too young. Sometimes she would try to restrain him. It struck me that while Americans celebrate all of the large and small ways in which our children attain independence, this is not a cultural universal.

Sam and Nancy came with me to my job, where I trained Peace Corps volunteers, outside the city of Santo Domingo. Between my classes I would visit him; as I worked in the outdoor classrooms, I would watch him run about, clad only in a diaper, pursued by Nancy and eating mangoes off the ground and cooling himself with the garden hose. He was part of the family at the Peace Corps training center. He had a valued place. No one was ever too busy to greet him. People would take time to play with him in idle moments. When we left, the



Dominican staff gave him going-away presents.

Back in the United States, when I had my second child, I was happy that I would be able to bring him to work with me at the college. But children and child care just do not have the same meaning in the United States that they did in the Caribbean. Bringing Sam to my U.S. workplace meant maintaining a collection of somewhat fickle college-age babysitters and conducting writing conferences while jiggling a colicky baby on my knee. While he was tolerated, his presence was clearly superfluous.

Although the birth of a baby is not celebrated in Santo Domingo, the baby's first birthday party more than makes up for it. These

continued on page 6...

When One Culture Rubs Up Against Another

Mary Exton,
Canaan, New Hampshire

"These will get really stiff and uncomfortable, and take hours to dry," my mother said, poking suspiciously at the very expensive, ducky-printed, Velcro-closing diapers my mother-in-law had sent across the Pacific from the United States. Bi-cultural marriage was not easy. It seemed that we were always forced to choose which way we should live. Before my daughter Elizabeth was born, my husband told me about disposable diapers. But China did not make diapers, disposable or otherwise. At the fancy hotel drugstore, imported Pampers or Huggies sold for the equivalent of a dollar apiece. At that rate, we calculated that Elizabeth would be going through \$4,000 worth of diapers a year. Our salaries were only half that amount.

One month after Elizabeth was born, my mother suggested that we toilet train her. My husband suspected this early toilet training would not work. Having read several parenting books sent from America, he mumbled something about the emotional scarring of over-early toilet training. Yet, my mother often bragged to us that I was well done with my toilet training when I was 6 months old. She was confident that she could toilet train Elizabeth. Motherhood was a new experience for me, so my mother became my first

supervisor.

Chinese toilet training involves holding a baby gently by the hips over a potty or by the edge of the road and whistling softly to imitate the tinkle of urine. Chinese babies and toddlers do not wear diapers at all, not even cloth ones, as cotton, water, and soap are all scarce items in China. Instead, babies and toddlers always wear open-crotch pants, because someone is always available to be with a Chinese baby. Parents begin to toilet train their child as early as one month. Incredibly, most babies are toilet trained by six months, at least during waking hours. By the time they can walk, usually at 12 to 14 months, they know to squat down in their open-crotch pants whenever they feel the urge.

A lot of American people were shocked that Elizabeth was toilet trained at such an early age. I was shocked that some American 3-year-olds were still using diapers.

Just as my mother said, Elizabeth was toilet trained when she was 7 months old. Even though she had some accidents, most of the time she was able to let us know she needed help to use the potty. A lot of American people were shocked that Elizabeth was toilet trained at such an early age. I was shocked that some American 3-year-olds were still using diapers.

An American friend of mine, Barbara, who was trying to toilet train her own son in China, watched in amazement at a Chinese preschool as teachers prepared 15 toddlers for a turn on the trampoline in the playground. "The teachers went around and said, 'pee, pee, pee,' " said Barbara. "I thought, how could they all have to go at the same time? But they all squatted down."

I had my second child in America. I tried to use the Chinese way to train him to use the potty, but

Cultural conflicts can create quite a challenge. In many ways, they are valuable.

As you work your way through them, you can gain not only strength and skills, but also new knowledge.

it did not work! At one and a half years old, my son still was in diapers. My mother called me a lazy mother because I was relaxed about training the American-born baby. Living in the different culture and having heard much different information about this issue, however, I stuck to my guns.

Cultural conflicts can create quite a challenge. In many ways, they are valuable. As you work your way through them, you can gain not only strength and skills, but also new knowledge. Toilet training is an issue that is heavily laden with emotion for most people, one about which there seems to be no obvious right and wrong. I was embroiled in a cultural conflict.

Part of the problem resides in the definition and goals of toilet training. If the caregiver defines toilet training as teaching or encouraging the child to take care of his or her own toileting needs independently, and her goal is to accomplish this as quickly and painlessly as possible, she'll regard 12 months as too early to start. Children under one year need adult help. However, if toilet training is regarded as a way to reduce the number of diapers used and the method is to form



a partnership with the child to do just that, you'll start as soon as you can read the children's signals and "catch them in time." This method focuses on interdependence or mutual dependence.

Chinese babies are held so much of the time, caregivers quickly learn to recognize the signs of the child's urination and bowel movements. Hence, from an early age, there is an association in the infant's mind between those functions and an action from the mother or caregiver. Consequently, when the baby wants to urinate, his whole body participates in the preliminary process. The Chinese mother, holding the baby in her arms, learns to be sensitive to the minute details of this process and to hold the baby away from herself at exactly the critical moment. Eventually, the infant learns to ask to be held out. In contrast, the transition is more difficult for middle-class American infants, whose functions typically occur alone. The mother begins to interfere with bowel and bladder activity after many months of only cursory attention.

My son's child care provider was very interested in what I said about Chinese toilet training. She told me that American people do not start to train their children until the children show an interest in using the toilet and are physically ready to use it alone. She said that a toddler should have the verbal and conceptual skills to be able to understand what is expected during toilet training.



He should know that certain things belong in certain places. She said that most Americans do not try behaviorist strategies, and believe that children will not stay dry and clean much before 24 months of age.

"Here, there is no shame about accidents," my son's child care provider said. This is another point of difference from Chinese toilet training. One characteristic of Chinese culture is honor and "saving face." I punished my Chinese-born daughter when she wet her pants or her bed. Chinese toilet training implies that the focus is on what the adult does, rather than on what the child does. But American research shows that children have their own feelings about toilet training. They are being asked to do something that they often cannot see any reason for. Their compliance will depend on their readiness, and if the child is not ready, toilet train-

ing can become a battle of wills; consequently, Americans believe toilet training should be done without any pressure. Toilet training is regarded as a highly individualized process in America.

Culture is never static; it continues to evolve. When one culture rubs up against another, both are transformed. A challenge for many parents in the United States is to maintain their cultural identity and pass it on to their children in the face of this inevitable evolution.

Cultures are not superior or inferior. They just are. Toilet training is the issue that made me learn more about and appreciate human diversity. Because I live in America now, I say "help the children to learn" rather than "train them." Toilet training should be thought of as a combination of skills that the child will acquire with guidance and assistance from parents and teachers.

... continued from page 2

lavish fiestas often last through the night, long after the guest of honor has retired to his or her crib or other sleeping spot (often the middle of the parents' bed). I was once invited to a first birthday party of a little girl in a government housing project in a poor barrio. Poor in the third world goes beyond any definition of the word in our society—no electricity, no running water (and sometimes no water at all), never enough food and not much opportunity. Yet the party was an extravagant affair. The little girl's dress cost the equivalent of 90 dollars. A professional photographer was hired to record the event. Many of the guests probably spent more on what they wore to that party than they did on food for the month. I know that for some of the children who attended, the party fare of cake and soda was all they ate that day. My first instinct was to condemn this out of hand. How ridiculous to spend all those precious resources in one day on a child who would not even remember it!

I was looking at the event through my American perceptions. I was thinking of birthday parties in the States, where the purpose seems to be to stage a social event for children. In the Hispanic culture, fiestas are not segregated by age, and families celebrate together in parties that last all of a day and night. Once I was able to stop thinking about what it meant to me and started to focus on what it meant to them, I began to see the sense in

what I was experiencing.

When I was able to step back, to turn down my own cultural noise, the sense I found had to do with opportunity. While Jessica's mother, Ada, did not have the resources to give her daughter many things that would lead to a fair shot at life, she *could* give her a birthday party. Jessica faced prostitution, domestic service, or perhaps a factory job in the Zona Franca (Factory Zone)—not much of a prospect. The birthday party could help us all to pretend for a day, to ignore the realities of life in that housing project. When you have to live for the moment in a country with no future, you make the moments count. There was glamour in that dress that could not be found in a month's worth of groceries. When you have nothing, the appearance, the illusion, of something is priceless.

I have lived on very little money at various times in my life. Before I went to Santo Domingo, I thought I had known poverty. In Santo Domingo, I learned that I never have and never will know it. In knowing that I will never know it, I could begin to understand those who dress in the latest fashions and live in shacks, and even those Cadillacs in the ghettos.

We moved back to the United States when Sam was 15 months old. He spoke rather fluent Spanish (at least for his age) and possessed a sense of having grown up in a wider community than his own small family. He entered a wonderful child care

center, but one where people wore green aprons and spoke very carefully to children, telling them how they liked the way they were sharing or playing with the red truck. Even though the staff tried to learn some Spanish words to talk with him, the transition was hard for all of us.

One of the Peace Corps volunteers I worked with told me that after having experienced another culture, he was able to look at his own in a new way. His perspective had been transformed. He used the example of examining an item at a crafts fair in the States: "Before, I would have said, 'Do I want this or not?' or 'Is it pretty?,' but now I think about the hands that took the time to make it and the life of the person who put it together."

Similarly, when I am confronted with cultural difference now, instead of asking myself, "Do I like it?," I try instead to think about how it came to be, what it means . . . "the hands that took the time to make it and the lives of the people who put it together." I am left with the lingering awareness, as I care for Sam and his two younger brothers, that things could be otherwise. The child rearing practice acceptable in the United States is only one option of many, and not necessarily the best.

I believe that Sam's life has been enriched by that other way of being, which must live in his subconscious like the residue of a distant dream. I hope he will remember that things do not have to be as they are. I hope it will make him more open to all of life's varied possibilities.

ACEI's 2001 Annual International Conference and Exhibition

April 3 -6, 2001 • Toronto, Ontario, Canada

The following infancy sessions have been accepted for presentation at the 2001 Annual Conference and Exhibition. Look for details as to the dates and times of each session in upcoming Conference publications.

EARLY LEARNING CANADA: ECES TRAIN PARENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

To inform colleagues in the child care community about Early Learning Canada so that they can build on this successful model of working with parents during the important early learning years — giving children their best start for lifelong learning.

A CIRCLE OF CARING HANDS: AN INFANT THERAPEUTIC PROGRAM MODEL

This session will provide participants with: 1) a specialized infant curriculum approach; 2) creative and resourceful strategies to assist in the development of positive parenting skills; and 3) strategies and program ideas that help service providers to coordinate and streamline community resources, maximize service intervention strategies, and promote hands-on support to families who seek access to community resources.

HEARTS AND MINDS: BRAIN DEVELOPMENT AND THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS IN INFANT-TODDLER EDUCARE

Participants will gain understanding of the importance of emotional security in brain development and the importance of relationships for creating emotional security; information about how one infant-toddler program fosters these qualities; and strategies for fostering nurturing relationships in their own programs.

TODDLERS: PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

Teachers who recognize toddlers' spontaneous cognitive problem solving can scaffold their learning. Teachers can promote problem solving by introducing open-ended, cause-effect type materials upon which toddlers act, and observe varied reactions.

THE INCLUSION OF INFANTS IN CANADIAN MULTI-AGE CHILD CARE

This presentation will enhance participants' understanding of factors affecting child care quality and outcomes of alternative models of care and education, such as multi-age groupings.

CREATING A CLASSROOM OF PEACE

After attending this session, the participants will be able to create a peaceful environment where children are happy, work together, share, cooperate, and respect each other in an anti-biased way.

GETTING HELP FROM ERIKSON, PIAGET, AND VYGOTSKY: DEVELOPING INFANT-TODDLER CURRICULUM

This presentation will show how to enhance daily caregiving activities and routines through utilization of infant-toddler curriculum based on infant-toddler theories and developmental stages. The 3 learning outcomes are: to understand the importance of systematic planning and thinking; to understand the relationship between the infant/toddler development theories and stages to infant-toddler curriculum development; and to learn to develop an infant-toddler curriculum with individual child's plan and group plan.

THE BRAIN AND ANTI-BIAS LEARNING: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN BRAIN RESEARCH AND ANTI-BIAS LEARNING IN PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

Explore newest research about the brain, linking it to implications for anti-bias/inclusive supportive principles, goals, skills, and practical activity implementation methodology for infant/preschool programs.

WEAVING: A CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR INFANT AND TODDLERS

This session describes the process and application of Weaving: a model for developing a responsive-based infant/toddler curriculum that is catered to and reflective of your families and community.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF THE NEW BRAIN RESEARCH

This session presents information on brain research, offers practical applications for classroom teachers, and demonstrates how to provide a brain-enriched environment for young children.

Call for Manuscripts

The readership of *Focus on Infants & Toddlers* is encouraged to submit ideas and manuscripts related to the care, education, development, and learning of infants and toddlers and their families. Editorial assistance is available if needed.

If you have any materials or suggestions to be considered, please contact the Editors:



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Focus

On

Infants & Toddlers

ages 0-3

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY

Theme

In this issue, we offer some perspectives on helping young children learn to regulate their own behavior and get along with others. This process goes by a number of different names: some call it discipline, some guidance, and others management. But, as any teacher—or parent—of toddlers will tell you, whatever name you use for it, this is one of the most challenging aspects of caring for young children.

One theme that connects all of the articles in this issue is the primary importance of respecting young children. Caring adults recognize the need to respond to children's challenging behaviors with sensitivity. They know that support and encouragement are far more effective than disapproval or punishment when helping children understand what is considered appropriate behavior.

We all need to remember, and to remind parents, that as toddlers become more independent, they also become fearful about change to their relationships with the people they love. Their ornery ways try our patience, but toddlers feel the need to test the strength of our commitment to them. Like the baby bunny in Margaret Wise Brown's *Runaway Bunny*, toddlers need lots of reassurances that no matter how they behave, we still care about them. No wonder toddlers love that book!

— P.C. and V.B.

Promoting Prosocial Behavior in the Toddler Room

Patricia Cantor,

Plymouth State College, Plymouth, New Hampshire

Even the most easygoing toddlers (and toddler caregivers) sometimes find life in the toddler room frustrating and unsatisfying. It would be difficult for anyone to have to share space, materials, and people day after day. For the very young, who are still learning acceptable ways of expressing their frustration, group life can be especially challenging. It should come as no surprise, then, that life in the toddler room sometimes can become pretty tense. Caregivers may wonder just how much more crying, hitting, biting, and pushing they can stand.

Why do toddlers act in this way? Because they are toddlers. They are still developing the prosocial skills they need to help them cope with frustrating situations. Their drive toward independence often conflicts with the desires of others around them, and so toddlers frequently find themselves in situations that make them feel powerless. Despite their good intentions, toddlers have not yet mastered the ability to control their impulses. Often, their first reaction to frustration is to cry or lash out at whatever they think is thwarting them.

Toddlers are also egocentric. Some of them may be beginning to understand another person's perspective, but for most children, the ability to truly empathize with another person will take some time to develop. Their own needs are paramount, even if it means bruising another child physically or emotionally. It is difficult for toddlers to understand how their actions affect other people. In fact, it is not unusual to see a toddler react with genuine astonishment when the child he has just bitten roars in pain.

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Preventing Problems

There are many actions that caregivers can take to prevent problems from arising within the toddler group. One of the first preventive measures is to examine the classroom to make sure that the physical environment is not creating or contributing to tension among the children. Both too much space and too little space can lead to problems. Caregivers will also want to consider finding the right balance of stimulation in the room. An abundance of bright colors, room decorations, and materials may be overstimulating and distracting to some toddlers, whereas a meager supply of materials will probably result in arguments over toys. Toddlers are curious and active by nature, and they thrive in environments that allow them to move around and explore in

safety and comfort.

Caregivers also need to consider the social environment, especially the interactions among the adults and children in the room. Are there enough adults in the room to provide not only



safe supervision, but also the individual attention that toddlers need? Do the adults model and reinforce the prosocial behaviors they want the children to develop, such as sharing, cooperation, sympathy, and respect? Toddlers respond remarkably well when teachers set a few reasonable limits and enforce them consistently (while recognizing, of course, that lapses will occur). Toddlers can certainly understand specific expectations for behavior phrased in the form of "do's" rather than "don'ts." They also find it helpful when caregivers suggest ways of dealing with upsets: "If you feel angry, come find me, and I'll help you." Toddlers need to know that their feelings—even their negative ones—are acknowledged and respected.

When Problems Occur

How should caregivers respond when toddlers act in ways that

Toddlers can certainly understand specific expectations for behavior phrased in the form of "do's" rather than "don'ts."

continued on page 4 . . .

Using "Time Out" Properly

Mary Ucci, Educational Director of the Child Study Center, Wellesley College, Massachusetts

While disciplining a child has different meanings for different people, I view discipline not as a punishment, but rather as a means to help the child develop ways to discipline himself. Using "time out" has become a very common approach among parents and child care providers alike. Time out is actually a current term for an age-old concept—taking a break from the action, finding a time and space to regroup and regain a better sense of self-control. If time out is used too frequently or inappropriately, however, it can be ineffective and potentially harmful.

Tremendous variation characterizes the way time out is used, but certain key elements are necessary for it to work effectively. First, it is important to understand that when a child misbehaves, he or she needs adult support. For this reason, a time out for a preschooler means that the child is not simply removed from the situation and placed alone; rather, that child not only needs to be removed from the situation, but also needs an adult to be with him/her.

Second, it is good to have a "script" that conveys a supportive message, so the child understands that although he may not be in complete control of himself at the moment, an adult is taking charge. For example, stating "I can see you're having a problem waiting to use the crayons" tells the child what the problem is. "I can help you" indicates who is in charge. When the child is taken away from the situation, saying "We can be here for a while and talk" lets the child know that there is a purpose to the time out. It is also important to avoid lecturing the child, and to use very short sentences.

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are not conducive to harmonious group life? Often, especially among less experienced caregivers, the first response may be to make the toddler stop whatever he is doing that is causing a problem: Two red-faced and squalling children squabbling over a toy? Take the toy away! While this action may stop the problem temporarily, it is not effective in helping children learn to regulate their own behavior. That requires long-term commitment and a more individualized approach. We should think about our goals for the children, just as we would with any other aspect of our toddler routine and curriculum. In a toddler program where establishing trusting relationships is an integral part of the curriculum, the development of self-regulation and social skills is critical. With these goals in mind, the thoughtful caregiver approaches each disciplinary situation as a learning experience for the child—and for herself.

Treating toddlers with respect requires us to treat them as unique individuals. Some children may pose greater challenges for us as caregivers than others. Take, for example, the case of a child who frequently bites other children. Outbreaks of biting are not uncommon in toddler programs, but no matter how often you experience them, these outbreaks are always difficult. As teachers, our sympathies are torn. We hate to see the pain and hurt of the child who has been bitten; we also feel badly for the child who has done the biting. A tried-and-true strategy in this kind of situation is close observation—even shadowing—of the child who is biting. This close observation can reveal patterns in the child's behavior, which may lead to the underlying causes. Realizing that a child bites during transition times, when the room is more chaotic, can help us recognize that child's need for security and calm.

For many toddlers, life in the toddler room is very different from life at home. In the toddler room, they are expected to share so much—toys, materials, adult attention. Their own individual schedules will probably have to change to conform to the group schedule. It is no wonder, then, that toddlers sometimes feel powerless and act out their frustrations in ways that adults find inappropriate. It is the caregiver's responsibility to separate the problem from the child, and to recognize that the circumstances of daily life in a group setting can affect children's behavior. Caregivers must also maximize their opportunities to help children learn how to appreciate and get along with others.

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Keep in mind that it is difficult for a child to talk about the problem in the middle of the disruption; once he or she has calmed down, the adult can tell him or her what happened ("You were taking Tommy's crayons"), and say, "It's not OK to take crayons away when Tommy is using them." It is equally important to tell the child what would be an acceptable thing to do, such as, "You may tell Tommy that you'd like to use the crayons when he's done."

Third, the amount of time for a time out should not be too long—perhaps one or two minutes. It is better to err on the side of making it too short rather than too long, since the whole point of time out is to be supportive rather than punitive.

Finally, however time out is used, it has to be tailored to the situation and, most important, to the child's stage of development. For example, it may be helpful to explain the problem and solution to a preschooler, but for a younger child who cannot articulate very well, it may be more appropriate to remove him from the problem and provide him with the support of a caring adult. Knowing a child's developmental needs and keeping in mind the purpose of time out will go a long way toward making the most effective use of this valuable approach.

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Learning To Engage

Virginia M. Barry,
Plymouth State College,
Plymouth, New Hampshire

Parents often ask me about the best way to discipline very young children. For some reason, I always want to replace the word "discipline" with "management." Generally, I just try to give the best advice I know, and that is to give your young child a sense of freedom, balanced with problem-solving skills. So much of discipline is centered on the child's ability to know how to organize the day and on providing environments in which the very young child is engaged in safe activities with, and under the watchful eyes of, a caregiver.

In today's world, child rearing is not simple, and planning a day that is meaningful and safe can be difficult. Do not focus on rules alone when planning for a day with a young child. Rather, focus on natural events in a child's life that enhance his or her understanding of the world and interest in exploration. Parents and caregivers should learn to observe young children and look for the beginnings of social referencing. Social referencing is the intentional search for information to help explain the meaning of uncertain circumstances and events. At around eight or nine months, young children begin to read facial expressions, voice intonations, and, to some degree, body language. Children who interact regularly with adults learn how to negotiate new situations and seek affirmation from the adult. They begin learning about acceptable behavior, as well as the signals for things and

actions that may be harmful.

Self-awareness in children seems to be established at about 12 months. Children learn to react to new events in varying ways, and they finally learn that they have control over their reactions at about 17 to 24 months. The key to self-awareness and a child's sense of her own capabilities is the interactive time she spends with caring adults. Children who are free to wander about in a safe environment with a responsive adult present develop a sense of control. When faced with a new situation, they look to the adult to learn how to handle the situation more effectively. In turn, parents and caregivers who learn to actively listen and observe are able to give children messages of acceptance and trust. Adults who engage with children throughout the day and encourage them to problem solve when faced with conflicts help the children learn to negotiate the situation, within limits, and to manage their own behaviors.

A few simple steps can help set the stage for

*In today's world, child rearing
is not simple, and planning a
day that is meaningful and
safe can be difficult.*

healthy behavior in children:

- Make children feel important by giving them lots of attention and positive feedback about their behavior in a variety of situations. Be careful not to focus on negative behaviors or to constantly reprimand them verbally.
- Know the child's temperament and how she approaches new situations.
- Reflect on the child's bodily rhythms (eating, sleeping, resting, playing).
- Plan the environment and give careful attention to safety concerns.
- Think about engaging activities and arranging for the child to have some time to explore and play, independent of adults.
- Learn to watch how the child solves problems and deals with new situations.
- Be available to the child and help him learn new ways to deal with difficult or frustrating situations.
- Think about your best times of day; in your planning, try to match these times with the child's awake times.

Children whose parents spend time with them talking, laughing, creating, and affirming are generally children who learn self-regulation. They are children who enjoy challenges and look forward to adult engagement, as well as enjoy time with other children. Self-regulation leads to children's ability to be responsive and responsible in their behavior throughout life.



For Further Reading

The following articles offer more perspectives on guidance and discipline with toddlers. All of these have been recommended by toddler caregivers.

"Time-Outs for Toddlers: Is Our Goal Punishment or Education?" by Mary Ellis Schreiber, *Young Children*, 54(4), 1999, pp. 22-25.

"Interactions That Promote Socialization: Assisting Toddlers and Caregivers During Conflict Resolutions," by Denise A. Da Ros and Beverly A. Kovach, *Childhood Education*, 75, pp. 25-30.

"Choice: A Powerful Tool in Caring for Toddlers," by Louise S. Pavia and Denise Da Ros, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 25(1), 1997, pp. 67-69.

A Glimpse Into a Child's Mind

Stories about children and the things they say offer glimpses into the unique ways they perceive the world. Children's conversations can help us remember what is truly important as we race through our busy lives. Consequently, anecdotes about what children say can be invaluable, as well as entertaining. Through the determined efforts of Jim Hoot, Judit Tamas, Leah Adams, and Patricia Kostell, you will have a chance to own a collection of such anecdotes. As a joint project with the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEPE), the Association for Childhood Education International has published *From the Minds of the World's Children*. Jim, Judit, Leah, and Patricia spent several years soliciting and recording stories from around the world.

The editors are seeking additional stories to be included in Volume Two, and maybe Volumes Three, Four, etc. . . . Please see the Call for Stories/Quotations below.

If you are interested in purchasing *From the Minds of the World's Children*, please call the ACEI Ordering Department at 1-800-423-3563, or 301-570-2111. We hope you enjoy reading *From the Minds of the World's Children*, and please consider submitting your own stories.

FROM THE MINDS OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN CALL FOR STORIES/QUOTATIONS

- 1) Submit your children's stories/quotations using this form and a separate sheet(s) of paper. You may share as many stories/quotations as you like. Conclude EACH story with your name, city, state/province, and country. (These will be published with each story.) Please don't forget to include the approximate age of the children in the stories. Children's first names may be changed.
- 2) Complete the CERTIFICATION OF ORIGINALITY AGREEMENT (below). One Agreement is fine for all quotes/stories submitted by one person.
- 3) You may submit your STORIES and the ORIGINALITY AGREEMENT at the conference. You may also E-mail, fax, or mail them to:

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525 Baldy Hall
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I certify that the submitted stories/quotations/anecdotes have not been previously published in another source. I hereby give the Editors and/or ACEI all the publications rights for the submissions. I understand that all proceeds from this volume will be used by ACEI and OMEPE to promote international development.

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STORIES/QUOTATION/ANECDOTE (submit as many as you like)

Submitted by _____ Country _____
Child's Approximate Age: _____

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Focus
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ages 0-3

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR THE EDUCATION COMMUNITY

Theme

Before we began doing some research for this issue of *Focus on Infants & Toddlers*, we had not given serious thought to the question of whether very young children should be exposed to computers. As we read about computers and very young children and talked with parents and teachers of infants and toddlers, we were surprised by much of what we learned. Based on our knowledge of infant and toddler development and our experiences as early childhood teachers, we had a gut feeling that it would be better to introduce computers later in a child's life. Although we soon found that many child development experts agree with the "later is better" theory, our first surprise was that there is little solid research about the best ways and the best time to introduce young children to computers. While some child development specialists and early educators recommend waiting as late as age 7 to introduce children to computers, others believe that even infants can benefit from exposure to computers.

We were even more surprised to learn that, despite the lack of conclusive research with regard to computer use by young children, there is a huge and growing market for computer software for infants and toddlers. Parents are not waiting to find out what the re-

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Computers and the Very Young

Patricia Cantor,
Plymouth State College, Plymouth, New Hampshire

Anyone who has ever spent time with a group of toddlers knows that 1- and 2-year-olds are incredibly active. They wriggle, bounce, run, roll, crawl, climb—and that's just in the first 20 minutes! It is difficult to imagine these busy little bodies sitting in front of a computer screen. Yet, increasing numbers of very young children are being introduced to computers, usually at home by parents eager to give them a head start for school. Industry figures indicate that the fastest-growing segment of the educational software market is programs designed for children under age 5. An estimated \$50 million is spent each year on software programs for young children (Morrison, 2001). And much of that \$50 million is going toward the purchase of "lapware." Lapware refers to programs intended for adults to use with children ages 6 months to 2 years; the assumption is that the child uses the software while sitting on the lap of a parent or caregiver.

Lapware is a relatively new product sector. These software programs intended for children under age 18 months were first introduced in the late 1990s. By that time, the use of computers by preschoolers had become widely accepted among parents and within the field of early childhood education. For example, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Position Statement on Technology and Young Children, adopted in 1996, states that "the potential benefits of technology for young children's learning and development are well documented." But the NAEYC position statement refers

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specifically to children ages 3 through 8. Can the same claim be made about the potential benefits of technology for very young children, those under the age of 3? Opinions vary.

Computer use by infants and toddlers is the subject of ongoing and heated debate among child development specialists and educators. On one side are those who fear that too-early exposure to computers will have harmful consequences for children's development. David Elkind, well-known author and professor of child development, is firmly opposed to computer use by children under the age of 3. "The parent's lap notwithstanding, the use of computers with the very young carries many more risks than it does benefits" (Elkind, 1998). Elkind believes that educational software for infants and toddlers is not only developmentally unsound, it is both wasteful and potentially harmful. He worries, for example, about the possibly harmful effects that staring at a computer screen may have on a

young child's vision. Susan Haugland, a professor of child development and President of K.I.D.S. & Computers, Inc., shares Elkind's concerns: "I do not recommend computer use for children younger than 3," she says, adding, "Computers simply do not match their learning style. . . . Computers are not a good choice for the developmental skills these children are learning to master" (Haugland, 1999).

Educational psychologist Jane Healy goes even further. In her book *Failure To Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds—for Better and Worse* (1998), Healy counsels waiting until children reach age 7 before introducing them to computers. After a detailed examination of the potentially detrimental effects of computer use on all aspects of the child's development, she warns that "the minute we introduce an artificially engaging stimulus with fast-paced visuals, startling noises, silly scenarios, and easy excitement, the brain is diverted away from its natural developmental tasks" (Healy, 1998).

Healy's views are shared by members of the Alliance for Childhood, an organization of educators, doctors, and psychologists. The Alliance for Childhood has published a report, *Fool's Gold: A Critical Look at Computers in Childhood*, claiming that computers can have damaging consequences for children under age 7 in terms of their health, social relationships, and intellectual development.

The release of *Fool's Gold* in the fall of 2000 generated immediate reactions from those who support the extension of computer use into infancy and toddlerhood. The influential *Children's Software Review* issued a formal response on its Web site, claiming that "more than 50 independent studies . . . show a positive relationship between computers and student achievement," and concluding that "We think that decisions about any learning material should always be made by an adult who knows the children on a day-to-day basis and considers their multifaceted needs" (*Children's Software Review*,

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search will say; they're already buying the software and using it with their children. In our informal interviews with a small group of parents, we discovered some shared beliefs and practices that suggest reasons for the boom in software for the youngest children.

But what surprised us most of all was that the parents we consulted are not discussing these issues with those who care for their infants and toddlers. When we surveyed several toddler teachers, we found that none of them had been approached by parents with any questions about computer use. When we asked parents to whom

they turned for advice and guidance about their child's computer use, not a single one named his or her child's caregiver.

We have attempted, in this issue, to provide infant and toddler teachers with information about the nature of the debate, commonly held beliefs and practices among parents, and implications for caregivers. We hope that this will encourage infant and toddler teachers to do their own reading and research into the issue, and to talk with parents about young children's computer use.

Special thanks to our colleague Mary Cornish, Ph.D., for her contributions to this issue.

— P.C. and V.B.

Parents' Beliefs and Practices

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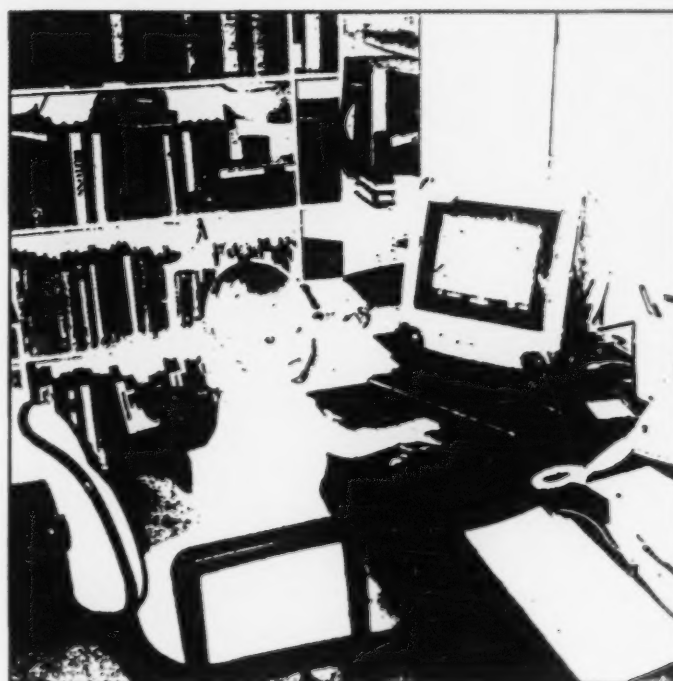
This list of parental beliefs and practices related to their toddlers' computer use is based on discussions with a small sample of parents of toddlers. We found very similar responses attributed to parents in articles in newspapers and popular magazines and on Web sites devoted to educational software.

"The earlier, the better."

- Parents are introducing children to computers when they are as young as 6 months. Most parents make their first attempt to encourage computer use when their child is around the age of 18 months.
- Parents believe that children must be ready to use computers. Typically, they do not push their children to use them. If the child does not show interest when first introduced, parents reintroduce the computer when the child is older, often around age 2 1/2.
- Parents participate in, and supervise, their toddlers' computer use. They recognize that teaching infants and toddlers to use computers takes considerable one-on-one instruction and support.

- When toddlers do not have the coordination required to move the mouse, parents do it for them.
- Parents report that their 2-year-olds demonstrate great interest and sustained involvement when using computers.
- Parents feel strongly that schools are placing emphasis on technology and expect children to be knowledgeable about computers when they

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2000). Warren Buckleitner, editor of the *Revue*, is a former preschool teacher with 14 years of experience reviewing children's software. He contends that well-chosen software can give the child, even the very young child, an educational advantage, and that computer use in moderation is not harmful to young children.

Professor Douglas Clements shares that view, as he stated in this interview with *Scholastic Early Childhood Today* in October 1999: "Clearly[,] children as young as one or two can sit on someone's lap and interact with the person and with what's on the screen. . . . In my professional opinion, if the child enjoys the experience and seems to be interacting and engaged, then the same benefits are present as when reading a book or playing blocks together."

It is unlikely that this debate will be resolved any time soon, because little solid research exists about the effects, positive or negative, of lapware. Computer use by infants and toddlers is too recent a phenomenon to have received the close scrutiny of careful research. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2000) recognizes that "while a market for computer software designed specifically for toddlers and young children continues to grow, little is known about the actual impact of this new technology on children's developing minds and bodies." Last fall, the organization made a commitment to funding research to investigate the developmental

effects of computer use.

Meanwhile, parents do not seem to be waiting for the results of the research. It's likely that computer use is already a part of the daily home life of many young children. In a recent article in the *New York Times*, David Pogue described his experience as the pleased parent of a computer-adept toddler. He never realized that there might be drawbacks, however, until he overheard a neighbor comment disparagingly about computer use by children. One of the mothers that we interviewed for this issue expressed similar surprise when asked if she had heard that some experts have concerns about computer use by infants and toddlers. "I'm shocked!" she exclaimed. "I was taken aback. It never even crossed my mind that [computer use] might be negative. . . . It is not something I ever considered bad for [my daughter]."

What does all this mean for infant/toddler caregivers? First, that caregivers need to talk to parents of infants and toddlers about computers. In interviewing parents and caregivers for this issue, we were astonished to find out how little they had discussed computers. Caregivers can begin by investigating some of the more popular lapware programs and talking with parents about the programs they use. Many of the lapware programs that are self-described as creative, interactive, and age-appropriate for infants and toddlers are actually composed primarily of skill-and-drill activities such as letter and number recognition, shape

matching, counting, and naming colors. Parents may be surprised to learn that these kinds of activities are not the best way to prepare their children for school, and that computer literacy is not a requirement for kindergarten entrance. Even parents who are strongly committed to encouraging their infants and toddlers to use the computer are open to suggestions about how to make the experience more meaningful for their children.

As the NAEYC Position Statement on Technology and Young Children states, "Early childhood educators must take responsibility to influence events that are transforming the daily lives of children and families" (NAEYC, 1996). It's time for infant and toddler teachers to do some reading and get educated on this issue. We need to learn more about the potential effects of computer use on young children's development. Many parents' view on exposure to computers is "the earlier, the better" to expose children to computers. If that's the case, it won't be long before infant and toddler programs are pressured to introduce computers into their daily routines. Caregivers will need to be prepared with an informed and informative response.

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continued on page 6 . . .

Is Earlier Really Better?

Hmmm . . .

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It is no mystery that many parents are made to feel that early exposure to activities and skills is crucial for a child's development. We live in a society that supports the notion that if you start your infant and toddler early on certain skills and concepts, he or she will naturally have an advantage and be better prepared for adult success. It is so easy for us to forget the magic of early childhood—how it feels to face each day with a sense of discovery and excitement; that feeling of delight when something new is presented to you so that you can explore and imagine the many different ways the information can be used and incorporated into your day.

Starting early should not be about introducing children to adult activities. Rather, it is really about immersing children in developmentally appropriate experiences that promote positive attitudes and the skills required for learning. Parents and caregivers need to remember that early experiences have both cumulative and long-term effects on each child's development. It is important that we recognize that there are optimal periods of development and that certain activities contribute to young children's healthy growth.

Parents and caretakers need to be sensitive to the best time for introducing activities, and to think about how certain experiences contribute to the scaffolding of skills for children in later development. The notion of scaffolding recognizes that

there are building blocks of learning. Carefully introduced concepts and experiences offer young children the foundation for learning, and help them develop a sense of connection that enables them to see relationships as they acquire new knowledge.

Parents concerned about starting early should consider what all children need for healthy development:

- A healthy start that provides for their basic health needs and nutritional requirements, so that children feel good about their physical well-being.
- A language-rich environment that involves interesting conversations with their caretakers and families every day.
- A wide range of experiences with printed and spoken language, starting in infancy and con-

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*Starting early should not be
about introducing children to
adult activities.
Rather, it is really about immersing
children in developmentally
appropriate experiences.*

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tinuing throughout their development.

- A sense of self-worth and self-esteem that comes from age-appropriate daily experiences with adults and other young children.
- The support of loving and caring people who express a range of emotions, especially laughter and joy, on a daily basis.
- A safe environment that supports their physical needs and encourages active movement.
- Exposure to meaningful information that offers novelty and challenges.

There's a great deal of value in starting early if we simply understand that we have to be selective in deciding what is "good" for young children. Young children should be involved in activities that they enjoy and feel successful doing, without being pushed to continue with something that obviously does not interest them. As parents and caregivers, we need to focus on the relevance of the activities or skills for the child. We must always keep in mind that the young child's brain works in such a way that only meaningful context contributes to learning. Computers may have great meaning to us in our daily lives, but what contextual meaning does a computer have to a very young child? We need to consider this question carefully before we introduce infants and toddlers to computers.

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enter school. Therefore, children need computer skills "to be ready for kindergarten and 1st grade." As one parent put it, "It used to be that children needed to know their ABC's, their 1-2-3's, and their name. Now, children need computer skills to be ready for school."

"Computers are educational."

- Some parents consider computers preferable to television, because they require interaction, rather than passivity.
- Others concede that computer use can be just as wasteful as television. However, when selected with care, TV programs, videos, and software can all promote learning.
- Parents regard computers as just one of many valuable tools to promote learning. In selecting activities and materials for infants and toddlers, they believe that balance and moderation are essential.
- Parents would like child care centers to make computers available to toddlers. They feel that children who do not have access to computers at home would benefit if computers were available in their early childhood setting.
- Parents are unaware of the concerns or potential problems associated with infant and toddler use of computers. Internet access is the only concern parents raised regarding their children's use of computers, but they do not believe this will be a problem until children are older.

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IMPLICATIONS OF BRAIN FUNCTION/STRUCTURE KNOWLEDGE FOR CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

It is no longer possible for educators to dismiss knowledge of neurobiological processes as outside their areas of expertise. Scientists are not the only ones who need to know how the neuronal network and its communication processes function, and to understand how the brain's modular structures and primary functions are integrated in complex interactions. Although much more must be learned before a direct relationship between specific areas of brain development and particular educational practice can be demonstrated, it is already clear that brain development results from the interaction of genetic potential and environmental experiences, that growth and elaboration of the neuronal network during the early years of life is critical to children's knowledge construction, and that complex interactions among the modular components of the brain influence the efficiency and nature of learning. Moreover, the brain's plasticity (i.e., its flexibility and adaptability, especially at early ages) creates multiple opportunities for diverse experiences to influence its development. In fact, current knowledge suggests that every curriculum and every educational act might be called "brain-based," because every experience has the potential for influencing brain development.

Educators who appreciate the complexity and interconnectedness of children's sensory/motor processing, emotion center monitoring, and higher order thinking can use that knowledge in planning curricula. In particular, their awareness of similarities and differences that exist among individual brains can help them to be sensitive to the needs of children whose brains may have experienced biological or environmental trauma and so require educational adaptations. Thus, both practicing educators and educators-in-training need to obtain a knowledge base in developmental neuroanatomy and neuropsychology if they are to be informed evaluators of brain research for educational practice.

Brain Development and Environmental Experiences: Prenatal to Age 3

Because recent brain research has been primarily focused on this age period, a relatively clear picture

can be given of early brain development and the environmental factors that may influence its direction and health. In the past few years, a number of books have been written that have neurologically sound, detailed descriptions of brain development during prenatal and early years (e.g., Eliot, 1999), well-reasoned suggestions for parents (e.g., Ramey & Ramey, 1999), and brain research-based calls for advocacy of early intervention in environmental risk conditions (e.g., Shore, 1997). There also have been a number of books going beyond the data to make less well-grounded claims for brain-based curricula, and there have been many commercial appeals to parents and educators to purchase "brainy" toys, music, and art materials for infants. It is often difficult for educators (and certainly for parents!) to make distinctions between well-reasoned approaches to the use of current brain research evidence and those approaches that go beyond present evidence in order to support other agendas.

Although there is less specific information about positive effects of certain environments, there is well-documented research evidence to show that highly negative environmental conditions can result in genetic/environmental interactions that cause harm to the developing fetus and neonate. Research also suggests that a paucity of social-emotional, sensory-motor, and cognitive-language stimulation in the infant and toddler years may retard optimum brain development. There is not yet sufficient evidence to predict specific, long-term consequences of poor environments on the anatomy of brain development, or the impact of such brain differences on children's learning ability at school-age, although a number of hypotheses are being tested.

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The above is an excerpt of a forthcoming book from ACEI. Watch for announcements about the publication of Brain Research and Childhood Education: Implications for Educators by Doris Bergen and Juliet Coscin.

Call for Manuscripts

The readership of *Focus on Infants & Toddlers* is encouraged to submit ideas and manuscripts related to the care, education, development, and learning of infants and toddlers and their families. Editorial assistance is available if needed.

If you have any materials or suggestions to be considered, please contact the Editors:

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